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THE INTERMEDIATE TEACHER'S ROLE WITH INDIAN CHILDREN.

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THIS DOCUMENT PRESENTS DESIRABLE CHARACTERISTICS POSSESSED BY INTERMEDIATE GRADE TEACHERS OF INDIAN CHILDREN. TO BE EFFECTIVE WITH INDIAN CHILDREN, INTERMEDIATE GRADE TEACHERS SHOULD HAVE WARMTH, SUPPORTIVENESS, AN UNDERSTANDING PERSONALITY, AND AN ENCOURAGING APPROACH. IN ADDITION, THEY SHOULD HAVE INSERVICE TRAINING AND BE AWARE OF BILINGUAL PROBLEMS. THE LECTURE APPROACH TO TEACHING INDIAN CHILDREN SHOULD BE LIMITED, AND TEACHERS SHOULD HELP THEIR INDIAN STUDENTS DEVELOP A GOOD SELF-IMAGE, A SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR LAW AND ORDER, AND ATTITUDES APPROPRIATE TO A MIDDLE-CLASS CULTURE. (JH)

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In the intermediate grades the teacher herself sets the stage for the atmosphere of the classroom and in working with disadvantaged youth this is a particularly important factor. In teaching Indian children some of the most common problems encountered by the teacher are apathy, defeatism, and the conviction that the school is a kind of prison from which they would like to escape. The teacher is also confronted with restlessness (inability to sit still) and inattention to the voice of the teacher during lesson presentations. How then can these difficulties be overcome, and how should teachers be slected?

In a study of culturally deprived children the role of the teacher is aptly put in this statement: "Teachers should be chosen because of their ability to help young children and because they can be warm and supportive to all children. These children need most of all teachers who will encourage them to try, to believe in their future, and to believe in their abilities. They are hungry for encouragement and for some reason to have confidence in themselves."[1]

In-service training is also strongly recommended in this study, particularly if the teacher has a different background from that of her students. More student teachers should be placed in schoolroom environments where they can meet problems head-on and where they can receive guidance from the experienced teacher.

A tape recorder is a device often used successfully in teaching reading and speech. The child listens to himself and detects his own shortcomings and mistakes. How effective it would be if teachers would occasionally use this device to diagnose their own roles in the schoolroom! Torrents of words are often poured out by the teacher who doesn't realize the impact of the

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1 Compensatory Education for Cultural Deprivation. Bloom, Hess, Davis, p. 32. Rinehart and Winston. 1965.

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voice on children who are unaccustomed to listening and who may not comprehend a large part of the vocabulary used. A harsh or high-pitched voice multiplies the difficulty and the child is, indeed, a captive unable to escape.

One recommendation then is to modify the amount of talking the teacher does. Lesson presentations are necessary at any level and it is essential to get the attention of the child, but long disserations can be broken up by seatwork, by sending the children to the board, and by frequent questions. A variation of activities will gradually accustom the child to listening and will help prepare him for the longer spans of attention necessary in upper grades where the lecture type presentation must be used more frequently.

The bilingual problem of some Indian youth as well as the nonverbalism of the home background create problems in the language arts. Therefore, following instructions does not come easily. The teacher must learn to simplify and to give directions carefully. A good method is to call on a child at random and have him repeat directions that have been given. This encourages attention-giving and also makes it necessary for the child to speak out. At the same time the teacher may gain some insight as to whether her instructions have been too vague and whether she has used language which is understandable. For example, a popular pre-primer directs the teacher to say to her pupils, "Mark the picture in the upper right hand corner." While perfectly clear to some children it may have no more meaning to a six year old Indian child than to say, "Label the lower section of Northern Slobovia." Some of them do not understand the meaning of such commonly used words as "future" and "wilderness" at fourth grade level.

On the advantageous side the fourth grade teacher has certain factors working for her. An introduction to a social studies text makes this statement: "Fourth graders still look to the teacher as an unimpeachable authority. The girls may idolize a particularly warm supportive teacher. The boys, although apt to rebel against too many female restrictions,

will respect the teacher's authority."[2] Also, as this text points out, curiosity is in full rich bloom. Whether Indian or non-Indian these facts hold true and with the Indian child it is rewarding to see the response to the enrichment, the interest-giving features she brings to the classroom. While Smythington Dumond the Third may have toured the redwood forests, it is unlikely that Mary Eagle Feather has been there and she will take a keen interest in looking at a picture of a car driving through the trunk of a giant redwood where Smythington may be inclined to take a rather dim view of it. So the teacher is automatically motivated in bringing extra materials into the classroom. Magazines, picutres, models, and special items in newspapers are excellent teaching tools.

Indian children do not normally build attitudes or adopt a middle class culture just by being told that something is right or wrong. They observe the behavior of others and particularly that of their teachers. They respond to the respect with which they are treated. Teacher responsibility and dedication are essential for she must give the child a good self-image, a growing sense of responsibility for law and order so that the school room can be a pleasant place, not a prison.

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[2] Man Changes His World (Introduction to), p. 20. Sincer Social Studies grade 4, 1965.

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